Use And Abuse.

BY J. M. S.

The life from the sun is pure and sweet,
As it tenderly kisses the earth,
To crowd the looms of the busy seeds
And pass into various birth.

And one seed weaves it a beauty, rich
And pure as an innocent child;
But another weaves a poison foul,
And the Holy life is defiled.

So the love of God upon human hearts
Falls with a holy thrill;
And in one are found the beauties of heaven.
But another with hell doth fill.

O God! make my heart as pure as Thine own,
My life as holy and sweet,
That I may reflect Thy glory divine,
Be Thine image and likeness complete.

The Qualification of the Eligible.

A New Sermon by Pastor C. H. Spurgeon.

'Even empty vessels borrow not a few.' II Kings 4: 3.

The best of men may die in poverty: here is the widow of a prophet left in destitution. We must not hastily censure those who leave their families unprovided for: circumstances may have rendered it impossible for the bread-winner to do more than supply the pressing wants of the hour. Yet assuredly it is sad to see the widow of so worthy a man in such straits! A widow, and the widow of A prophet of the Lord, our concern for her is tender.

Her husband had been among the persecuted, and having been, by oppression, deprived of all that he had, it came to pass that when he died he left his wife and children in distress; from which I gather that holy men may be in the worst of circumstances, and yet it will be no proof that the Lord has forsaken them. We may not judge a person's character by his position in life. Certainly, poverty's no sign of grace, for there are many who bring themselves to it by their own wickedness; but, on the other hand, wealth is

NO SIGN OF DIVINE FAVOR;

for many there be who will have their portion in this life only, and have no inheritance in the life everlasting. As a general rule, piety is more often found among the poor than among the rich; and in persecuting times, it is almost of absolute necessity that a clean conscience should involve poverty. Let this encourage any here who are just now very low in circumstances. You are where prophets and saints have been. God can lift you up, and would do so if it were really for your good. Be more concerned to act like a Christian in your present condition than to escape from it. Remember, however poor you are, your Master was poorer and that whatever else you have not, you still have His love. Seek to be rich in faith, if you be poor in all besides. This sorrowing widow, when she found hreself in poverty, and likely to lose her sons

WENT TO GOD IN HER TROUBLE.

She hastened to God's prophet, for that was the way in which broken hearts would then speak to God in special trials; and it was a way with which as a prophet's widow she was well acquainted. But now we have another Mediator, Jesus Christ the righteous, and every Christian in trouble should take his burden to God in Christ Jesus. We readily enough tell our friends and neighbors, and it is natural we should, for the human mind wants sympathy equal to that of the man Christ Jesus, and there is no power to help equal to that of the Father.

God was pleased to ordain by His servant a way of escape for the poor woman. The little oil that she had in the house was to be multiplied till there should be enough, when sold, to pay her debts with; from which I gather that if in our distress we take our trouble to God He will deliver us. This woman is not a solitary instance; she is one of a great multitude for whom the Lord has wrought graciously.

Yet the Lord allowed His handmaid to be very sorely pressed. She could not secure delay nor make any fair terms with the hard creditor. He was already in the house, and he would be satisfied with nothing less than both her sons. She was so reduced that she had nothing in the house but a single pot of oil; what could she do? She had hoped for deliverance, but now the night of utter misery was coming on, and she saw no light. Beloved, it has been the same with many of the Lord's tried ones, and it may be the same with you. The Lord does not promise to rescue us in our time, nor to save us from waiting; rather does He set it to be right to try our faith and patience, for our good and for His own glory. Wherefore, I say to you whose seems to come last, be strong to wait, and do not dishonor the Lord by unbelief. Waiting in faith is a high form of worship, which, in some respects, excels the adoration of the shining ones above.

But the way in which this was delivered, was one which proved and exercised and strengthened her faith. She had to go and borrow empty vessels of her neighbors. That was a strange proceeding; empty oil jars would seem to be useless lumber in her house. Her neighbors, also, might make remarks upon her singular conduct. She had to shut the door, that no curious eyes might watch her, and she had then, with full confidence in God, to take her one pot of oil and go on pouring out from it into the empty vessels till they were all filled. Unbelief might have said to her,

'THAT IS A WILD PROCEEDING!

How can you fill these vessels out of that one little jar? There is but very little oil to begin with, and certainly that cannot be enough to fill all these borrowed jars. The prophet has mocked you; he is exposing you to the jests and jeers of all your neighbors.' But her faith, when exercised, was equal to the emergency. She did what she was commanded to do: she did it in faith; and the result answered the end.

1. There is teaching in this narrative, first of all

IN REFERENCE TO GRACE

that is in Christ Jesus. Now in this case, notice first of all what was required. In this miracle all that was required was empty vessels. This is precisely all that Jesus Christ requires of us, that we be to Himself and his divine fullness as empty vessels. The grace is with Him, not with us; just as the oil was in the woman's pot, and not in the empty vessels. Suppose that one of her neighbors had said to herself, when the boy came to borrow the vessels, 'Poor woman! she modestly asks for an empty oil jar, but I will send her in a full one to help her.' The lad joyfully accepts the offer, and takes home a jar full of oil. When his mother is pouring out the oil, the boy brings the vessel. She looks at it, and it is full. 'My child,' says she, 'this is of no use to me; it is full, and we cannot fill it again what is full already.' So, if there be one person in the world who is by nature full of merit; if there be a man in the world that does not want mercy, that has enough natural goodness to save him, why, Christ cannot do anything for him, and he cannot be of any use as a receiver of grace. As long as the man is full of himself, there is no room for Jesus Christ.

Our own supposed fullness shuts us out from receiving Christ's fullness. It must be so. You will remember

THE STORY OF THE PLOUGHMAN

and Mr. Hervey. The ploughman asked Mr. Hervey what he thought was the greatest hindrance to men's salvation. Mr. Hervey replied, 'Sinful self.' 'No,' said the ploughman, 'I think righteous self is a greater hindrance to men's salvation than sinful self. They that are sinful will come to Christ for pardon, but they that think they are righteous never will.' The full oil jar can hold no more. A deserving sinner (if such a person could exist) would be of no use to the Saviour, and the Saviour could be of no use to him. Remember this. *Emptiness is eligibility.* Want of natural goodness proves your need of God's grace, and that need is your capacity to receive.

Some will say, 'Truly I have no good works in the past; but then, I had good resolves for the future. I am going to be what I should be.' Are these resolutions formed in your own strength? These also will impede the inflow of the heavenly oil. It is when we are without strength that salvation comes to us. Ah, friend! if you can save yourself, Christ will not save you. Again I remind you that you must be emptied of self ere grace can fill you.

You are saying, 'But I don't feel as I should; I don't think as I should; I don't weep as I should. This only proves how empty you are; and into all this natural emptiness of yours the superabounding grace of the Lord Jesus Christ will flow till it fills you, and overflows to His praise. Oh that by an act of faith you would receive what Jesus so freely gives to as many as will receive Him! That is all the empty sinner has to do: 'As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God.' All that the Saviour wants of us is our need of being saved, and our acceptance of His salvation. Come along with you!

Now, observe what followed. In this miracle, as soon as the empty vessels were brought, the oil flowed till they were full, of whatever size they might be. One neighbor lent a little jar, another a large one; but they were all filled. So, when a sinner receives of Jesus, he receives

ALL THE GRACE HE WANTS.

till he is full. 'Ye are complete in Him.' 'Of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.' O soul, if you believe in Jesus you shall find in Him grace to pardon you, grace to change your nature, grace to keep that nature changed, grace to preserve you till you are brought home to glory. Christ freely gives everything a sinner wants between the gates of hell and the gates of paradise. He does not half fill, but He makes the soul say, 'My cup runneth over.'

What was the space in which the miracle endured? How long did this oil continue to flow? That is a point worth noticing. It flowed as long as any empty vessel could be brought; and the command was, 'Borrow not a few.' I know how many souls Christ will bless. He will bless as many souls as are empty, and are placed beneath the flow of His divine grace. That He filleth the hungry with good things is always the rule, and the other rule is equally sure—the rich He sendeth empty away. We know how long Christ will continue to save sinners. It is as long as any needy sinner comes to Him to be saved. 'Bring me yet a vessel.' Don't tell me, 'There is not a vessel more,' for I am sure there must be many more. Our Lord has not come to the end of the vessels yet; there are many more to be filled. There are plenty of empty vessels still about. I pray that they may be brought to the fullness of our Redeemer, and be filled to the brim.

I have used a very simple method of preaching the Gospel in thus talking; but, simple as it is, there are a great many who will not understand it. Let me just rehearse it again. You have broken God's law, and you are lost. The only way in which you can get forgiveness is through the merit of Jesus, and that He will freely give you if you simply come and confess your sin, and take Him to be your all in all. Adore His mercy, magnify His love, accept His grace, yield to the working of His Holy Spirit, and you are saved. Come, empty pitcher, stand beneath the flowing fountain and it will surely fill you. Do you understand me? The Lord make you to prove that you do so by your practical compliance with my exhortation.

II. I shall further use the text in reference to

ANSWERS TO PRAYER.

My conviction is, brethren, that we do not pray enough. I do not, by this remark, measure our prayers by time, but I mean that we do not ask enough of God. We are not straitened in Him, but we are often straitened in ourselves. The prophet's advice to the woman was, 'Borrow empty vessels'—notice the next word—'borrow not a few.' It was needful thus to urge her to large things. Covetous men need restraining, but in asking of the Lord, our hearts need enlarging. This godly widow had the blessing now at her disposal to increase or diminish. If she borrowed few vessels, she would have but little oil; if she borrowed many vessel they should all be filled, and she should have much oil. She was herself to measure out what she should have; and I believe that you and I, in this matter of spiritual blessings from God, have more to do with the measurement of our mercies than we think. We make our blessings little, because our prayers are little.

I will take two points—prayers about ourselves, and prayers about others. *Concering ourselves.* Brethren, some have never brought their sins and